

The Noble Eight-fold Way

and some of its numerous misinterpretations

[a historical survey with a Big Apology]

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It would not be incorrect to say that very few items of the Dhamma have lent themselves over the centuries to such diversity of interpretation as the subject of the Noble Eight-fold Way or the *Ariyo Aṭṭhaṅgiko Maggo*. We believe this was so even before the pre-classificatory and pre-analytical period of Abhidhamma thinking. We present to you first of all, in support of this assumption, the Cullavedalla Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya [MN.I. 299-305] which was delivered by the great lady of the Sāsana, Therī Dhammadinnā, to her erstwhile husband Visākha, who was still a layman, while answering some of the Dhamma questions put to her by him. What is to be noted as remarkable about this sutta is that on its contents being reported to the Buddha by Visākha at Dhammadinnā's own request, the Buddha placed on it his 'royal seal of authority', saying that he would not have differed from her even in a single syllable if the questions were put to him.

Anticipating, as it were, the possible confusion of relating and identifying various items of the Dhamma with one another, our Therī Dhammadinnā explains, unmistakably clearly the relationship of two of the major items of religious culture in Buddhism, namely the Noble Eight-fold Way or the *Ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo* and the three-fold culture or *tisso sikkhā*.

We reproduce here the translation of the Cūlavedalla Sutta from the Middle Length Discourses for ready reference and check up.

Cūlavedalla Sutta - MN. 44. Middle Length Discourses- p. 398 (THE NOBLE

EIGHTFOLD PATH)

10. "Lady, is the Noble Eightfold Path conditioned or unconditioned?"

"Friend Visakha, the Noble Eightfold Path is conditioned."

11. "Lady, **are the three aggregates included by the Noble Eightfold Path**, or is the Noble Eightfold Path included by the three aggregates?" 463

"The three aggregates are not included by the Noble Eightfold Path, friend Visakha, but **the Noble Eightfold Path is included by the three aggregates**. Right speech, right action, and right livelihood - these three are included in the aggregate of virtue. Right effort right mindfulness, and right concentration - these three are included in the aggregate of concentration. Right view and right intention - these states are included in the aggregate of wisdom."

[* Note by the author of this article - The word *khandha* or three khandhas, rendered in the translation as aggregate, is unmistakably used here to refer to the three items of religious culture or *tisso sikkhā* in Buddhism. The author wishes to make this further observation, with high-lighted emphasis in places. " By no stretch of imagination does this suggest **that right view and right intention together are identifiable with or constitute wisdom.** "]. In view of the above very clear remark of Therī Dhammadinnā, to imagine anything to the contrary does not appear to be very acceptable.

463 Here is a note by the translator: "The word *khandha* here has a different meaning than in the more common context of the five aggregates affected by clinging. It here refers to a body of training principles, **the three divisions of the Noble Eightfold Path into virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*).**"

We emphatically say that this note by the translator is an unwarranted misleading comment. The **body of training principles** referred to here is much more than the Noble Eight-fold Path. Is it not known that it is abundantly clear

from the Suttas that the totality of the Buddhist spiritual culture covered by *tisso sikkhā* consists of **ten** and not just **mere eight items** which make only the path? See below the references to the Janavasabha and Mahācattārīsaka Suttas [MN. III. 75 f.]

3. Here is the Janavasabha Sutta [DN. II. 216 f.] Rhys Davids - Dialogues of the Buddha II. p. 250

The text here explains the attainment of Samādhi as the eighth stage of the Eight-fold Path **through successive stages, starting with Sammā-diṭṭhi**. * We produce below in full **Rhys Davids' translation which is completely wrong** and destroys this vital bit of doctrinal information. He has **blundered on the translation of the word *pahoti***. Here it means arises from, produces, generates. And not **suffices**.

This has compelled Rhys Davids to reverse the word order, making complete nonsense in saying **Right intention suffices to maintain right views**. [It should correctly mean here **Right views produces or gives rise to right intentions**.]

After Rhys Davids, find Maurice Walshe who has had the unusual luck to get it completely correct.

Rhys Davids... the Buddha Supreme hath revealed the Seven Requisites of Intellectual concentration, for practice of Right Rapture, for the perfecting of Rapture? What are the seven? Right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness. That concentration of thought, Sirs, which is prepared by these seven factors, is called the Noble Right Rapture together with its bases, together with its requisites. **Right intention suffices to maintain right views**, right **speech suffices to maintain right intention**, right action suffices to maintain right speech. right livelihood suffices to maintain right action, right effort suffices to maintain right livelihood, right mindfulness suffices to maintain right effort, right rapture suffices to maintain right mindfulness, right knowledge suffices to maintain right rapture, **right freedom**

suffices to maintain right knowledge..

Maurice Walshe... How well has the Lord Buddha who knows and sees pointed out the seven requisites of concentration, for the development of perfect concentration and the perfection of concentration ! What are they? They are right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, That one-pointedness of mind that is produced by these seven factors is called the Ariyan right concentration with its bases and requisites. **From right view arises right thought**, from right thought arises right speech, from right speech arises right action, from right action arises right livelihood, from right livelihood arises right effort, from right effort arises right mindfulness, from right mindfulness arises right concentration, from right concentration arises right knowledge, from right knowledge arises right liberation.

** Why not translators and the readers of this Sutta clearly admit that the reference here in the Cūlavadda is specifically to the threefold training of *tisso sikkhā* of the true Buddhist scriptural tradition?

** This item of *tisso sikkhā* exists in Buddhist texts, covering the entire range of Buddhist spiritual culture, without it being coupled with the Noble Eight-fold Path. [See MN. I. 71 and AN. I. 230 ff.]. Here is a clear admission that the totality of the culture of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* is much larger than that of the Eight-fold Path.

[See further **Buddhist Monastic Discipline** by **Jotiya Dhirasekera, 1982** - i.e. by the author of this article while he was formerly a layman, p. 43.].

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